2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

that the Yao occupied in Central Africa as middlemen and traders. As far back as 1798 Laçerda described the Yao rôle as active traders. They bartered ivory, slaves, beeswax and tobacco with the Arabs along the East Coast of Africa for guns, gun-powder, cloth and beads. We cannot easily estimate what proportion of the population was engaged in whole-time slaving and trading. The larger proportion must have found it necessary to cultivate their gardens of finger-millet and sorghum in the rainy season to supply them with the major food crops. It seems likely that slave-raiding and trading were occupations mostly followed during the dry season.

The Yao therefore had become accustomed to a variation of activities and division of labour, at least a century before the Whites came to Nyasaland. Their wants at this time had already become sufficiently diversified to include cloth, beads, gun-powder and guns. All these trade goods are more durable than the foodstuffs which are the measure of wealth among a people who support themselves entirely by their own produce. But the individual want for these trade goods was limited, and the Yao used their surplus rather as capital for trading farther inland with other tribes.

There is considerable evidence, both from my informants and the writings of early travellers, that these trade goods—ivory, cloth and slaves—came to be used as currency, and most people recognized a fixed relationship between the three commodities. A female slave could be exchanged for an amount of calico or ivory that was constant over fairly large parts of Central Africa; the value of a tusk of ivory could be expressed in calico in the same way. By enterprise, therefore, in trading and raiding, an individual could accumulate wealth in the form of calico, guns, beads, ivory or slaves. But the personal consumption of trade goods is of necessity limited, so that the Yao preferred to accumulate their wealth in the form of slaves. The reason for this lies in the general political structure of the early chiefdoms, which I describe later. Slaves were not only labourers and serfs; they also increased the military and political power of their masters. At the same time slaves could be sent to the coast in a caravan and bartered for cloth, or, since they were always prized, they could be used to settle claims for compensation from aggrieved neighbours. The slave trade therefore, although related to domestic

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

slavery in that a trader could at any moment send some of his own slaves to the coast, was actually quite a separate institution.

Although the advent of the White Administration stopped both domestic slavery and the slave-trade to the coast, both of which were vitally important elements in Yao economy, it did nothing to decrease or reduce the variety of the wants of the Africans. On the contrary, it obviously increased those wants. The missionaries, who were the first Whites to settle in Nyasaland, were forced to import large quantities of cloth and beads so that they could buy foodstuffs and pay their labourers. They quite unintentionally, therefore, became competitors with the Yao in this trade. By some accounts their goods were both superior and cheaper. As early as 1878 the African Lakes Company was sponsored by the Church of Scotland Mission, so that it could take over the trading part of their dealings with the Africans. The planters and traders who began to settle in the highlands after 1890 brought more and more cloth, beads and other trade goods into Nyasaland to pay wages and buy foodstuffs.

When the Protectorate was proclaimed in 1891 and the Administration started to put down domestic slavery and the trade in slaves to the coast, the monopoly of trade in goods fell directly into the hands of the Whites. After 1893, when coinage was introduced, the economy of the country rapidly changed from one based on barter with slaves and ivory as the main outgoing commodities, and slaves, calico, beads and brass rings as the incoming commodities, to an economy in which the wants had become even more diversified. In 1895, the *British Central African Gazette* could record:

> The wants of the people of this part of the world not long ago were limited to sufficient calico to clothe the family, but in one short year their wants now include boots, size and quality a minor point, turbans, coats, and in fact at a distance the half-naked native of yesterday has the appearance of Sikh soldiery.[1]

That the Yao took to the use of money is illustrated by the Acting Commissioner's statement in 1897: 'The Yao thoroughly appreciate having a currency. It has proved, in fact, a great step towards civilizing the native of this part of Africa. He is now able to accumulate his earnings, which formerly in the days of a

[1] Vol. i, 2 (Sept. 26th, 1894).

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

village headman and had to administer his slaves and relatives in his village in the same way as a village headman.[1] MacDonald shrewdly observes :

> Where the chief sees occasion to interfere with his subordinates he generally consults his own interest. He will say to a headman, 'I see that you have been behaving badly to that subject of yours. You cannot get on with him: he must leave you and come and dwell in my own village.' The chief thus secures another servant.[2]

Another writer observed, 'As a chief's power consists of the number of his subjects the loss of a man is a serious matter.'[3]

A village headman also tried to strengthen his position against the chief and against other village headmen by attracting to himself as many followers and dependants as he could. The process whereby a man might increase his status is described as follows :

> However large the settlement may become, the man that is first in the field is the chief or headman. In course of time he adorns his position by acquiring wealth. He may shoot some buck and get possession of their skins. With these he goes to the Mangoni country and buys slaves. An old person he obtains for a single skin, but a young slave costs two, and women cost much more than men. The female slaves thus bought are his junior wives and he keeps them busy in hoeing the farm, and all such female duties. The male slaves he employs in farming, building, making baskets, sewing garments and such masculine pursuits. He keeps all these persons strictly at their duties, and at the same time welcomes an opportunity of selling them at a profit. If his daughters were unmarried, he would give them slave-husbands. The natives aim at 'replenishing the earth and subduing it'. As it is no expense for them to rear families, they are all desirous to have many children.
>
> Besides this increase of the village from the chief's own resources, there may be an accession of freemen. After the settlement is begun, a man may come to its founder and say, 'I wish to live with you.' The village chief gives him permission and calls him 'younger brother'. The newcomer brings his family, builds a house, and cultivates a farm in the same way as his chief. A freeman may leave his present chief and take up his abode with another, whose subject he becomes. His former chief has no longer any authority over him

[1] MacDonald, *Africana*, i, 154. [2] MacDonald, *Africana*, i, 155–6.
[3] Hynde, R. S., 'Among the Machinga People', *The Scottish Geographical Magazine*, viii (1891), 656–63.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

amongst the Yao. The religious sanctions behind tribal initiation ceremonies were weakened when many of the village headmen adopted Islam, and the rights of holding the Islamic equivalents fell to commoners who were leading Moslems. Thus for many village headmen the significance of the holding of initiation rights fell away. The White Administration has introduced new political personalities into the field, such as the court clerk, the court sergeant and other members of the chief's bureaucracy. These persons have been able to acquire peculiar positions of power in competition with the chief's traditional advisers.[1] Some wealthy individuals are able to wear better clothes, build better houses, and have more personal attendants, than the chiefs. For example, there is a carpenter in Kawinga's area living near an Indian store,[2] who is wheeled about in a garetta (ricksha) as the chiefs are, and who dresses far better than any of the chiefs.

But these changes have not yet affected the pattern of social relationships appreciably. Up to the present as new elements were introduced into Yao social structure they have been absorbed in terms of the traditional structure. The traditional chiefs, therefore, became the Principal Headmen when White Administration was imposed on them. Village headmen, no longer able to compete with each other in terms of followers and slaves, now began to vie with each other for 'books'. Important village headmen became the Moslem leaders, and the larger mosques were built at their villages. The chiefs, by virtue of their annuity from the Government, are able to maintain a higher standard of living than most of their subjects: they build burnt-brick houses, they wear finer clothes, they are wheeled about in garettas or, latterly, are pillion passengers on bicycles pedalled by retainers. By using their annuities as capital, they have been able to grow more tobacco than most of their subjects and so still maintain economic ascendancy over them.

So that until 1949, at least, in spite of the introduction of

[1] cf. my 'The Political Organization of the Yao of Southern Nyasaland'.

[2] He does not live in a village as most people do; he is an Nguru, and has none of his relatives near him, which is significant. His relationships with his clients are formal and transitory and he is not bound by traditional kinship ties. He therefore attempts to achieve prestige through conspicuous expenditure.

3: Stannus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7

generous and popular, the donations may mount up to a useful sum. Dancing goes on late into the afternoon when all return to the village. 843

The man may not speak to his guardian again until after the birth of the child. The two women guardians, the *nkamussi* and the *nakanga*, as a rule cease sexual intercourse with their husbands during the same period or, at all events, during the last month before the birth of the child.

The child born of a woman who has not gone through *Litiwo* is buried alive. [847]

Chieftainship. The Yao when they migrated to their present country were headed by a number of their chiefs. These eventually settled in different areas adjacent to one another, each ruling over a considerable tract of country. The chief was supported by a number of headmen, each of whom looked after a village; the chiefs and headmen in turn being assisted by the village elders. 622 643

Often among a chief's counselors one found a number of his relatives, and sons and brothers were often made headmen. A man assuming chieftainship often had to dispose of a brother of whom he was afraid. 643

Chieftainship is hereditary, the chief's name being passed on to each successor. Succession is to eldest son of the eldest sister or a son of some other sister. Failing these, it passes to a grand-nephew. If there is no acceptable adult nephew, a full brother may succeed.

Macdonald's account of the Malemya's succession[1] is, I believe, incorrect. The old Malemya (Nalutumbo) was succeeded according to custom by his nephew, Kasabola who, as Malemya, was called Ndalama. Kumtaja was not a younger brother of Nalutumbo or Kasabola, but a cousin of the latter. Ndalama was succeeded by a nephew, not the eldest but the second son of a sister, the eldest having already succeeded to the chieftainship of Kumtaja was therefore ineligible. The present Malemya will be succeeded by a grand-nephew, the son of a daughter of his eldest sister, his sister having no sons. [114]

A successor inherited all the wives and slaves of the deceased chief and all his goods and chattels, guns, ivory and gardens. Any small possessions might be divided among the deceased's children and in the case of guns, those who had always used them often laid claims not to be separated from their weapons; these claims were often allowed by the new chief. 643 428

In the same way, any ordinary man's successor is his nephew, the son of a sister, who inherits all goods and chattels and slave wives, but not free-born wives, nor gardens, which go to the free wives. Stock is generally divided among the children.

Before 1891, when a British Protectorate was formally declared over Nyasaland, each chief ruled supreme. He was consulted as to the dates for *Unyago;* he directed the harvesting, etc.; he proclaimed war and generally was paramount among his people. It will be seen, therefore, that he was a busy man, but he received no direct remuneration. His wealth consisted of slaves and ivory. Slaves he obtained in warfare and as blood money, 643 [554]

[1] Op. cit., vol. I, p. 180.

4: Stannus D-5 (ca. 1909)1910 FT7 Yao FT7
Maravi FR4
Ngoni FR5
Bemba FR3

M 301 Necklaces, most commonly for children, are made of a number of little square pieces of hippo ivory strung together, ornamented with geometrical designs.

M 789 Medicine is often carried in a little packet suspended round the neck, as also charms of various kinds. The medicine may be some powdered charred roots or little twigs, leaves, etc., of some tree; these are sometimes now wrapped up in a Y [789] piece of paper on which is written some extract from the Koran (among Mohammedan Yao); this is then sewn in a little piece of calico and adorned with beads and suspended round the neck with a string.

Charms take various forms. Small pieces of wood or, to guard against attack M 301 by lion, tooth are worn. Armlets of the same kind are worn against sickness, and others are worn by Angoni, made of beads to which knives are attached. Bracelets of ivory, plaited grass and elephant tail hairs are also worn.

N 301 Metal and wirework bracelets are commonly worn by Angoni, also twisted wire finger rings and rings of lead and ivory. Heavy brass ankle rings and spiral brass leg and arm rings 6 inches and 8 inches wide are worn by some of the women (Atonga).

B 301 Bracelets cut from the nail of the elephant's foot are worn by Awemba hunters, and little finger rings cut from the scale of the ant-eater are worn as medicine against fever by headmen.

Belts made of wound copper wire are worn round the waists by Wankonde.

M 302 The use of pigments applied to the body is very limited. I have seen stripes of these, white and red, on the faces of young women, boys and dancers, generally M after some ceremony. The significance I do not know. Pigments are now obtained [439] from Indian traders, and I do not know how old the custom is. There is no beautification of face, body, nails, and eyes by pigments. The only application made to the skin is castor and ground-nut oils to keep it soft—no scents are used.

CLOTHING.

M Y N 291 [855] Among tribes of Nyasaland the amount of clothing worn varies very considerably from nothing to European garments.

Of the large majority, however, including Mañanja people, Yao and Angoni, one may speak generally.

The young children commonly run about naked, or have a strip of cloth covering the pudenda, supported by a string round the waist.

M Y N [556] Among the adult population the amount of clothing depends largely on the affluence of the individual, and those who cannot afford much have little clothing. A man wears a strip of calico supported in front and behind by a string round the waist, a woman a piece of calico 18 inches wide reaching from the middle of the thighs to the umbilicus.

Of the more prosperous, the men wear calico from a little below the knee to the waist, carefully wrapped round the body, and kept in position by some kind of belt; sometimes it is folded across the upper part of the chest or sometimes crossed over in front and two ends tied behind the neck.